

# THE AMERICAN JOURNAL OF NURSING

VOL. I

MARCH, 1901

NO. 6

## ORIGINAL COMMUNICATIONS

### WITH THE MAINE TO SOUTH AFRICA \*

By M. EUGÉNIE HIBBARD

Late Superintending Sister American Hospital Ship Maine

(Continued)

DURBAN, NATAL, SOUTH AFRICA, *Sunday, February 18, 1900.*—Leaving the town of Durban behind us, we drove along a particularly good road, banked on either side by flowering shrubs and foliage plants luxuriant in their growth and peculiar to tropical climates. There are many hedges here made of the prickly pear (cactus), which when in flower presents a most attractive line. This plant we were warned not to touch, as the fine points easily penetrate the skin and poison the flesh. The clear atmosphere and brilliant sunshine shows us the country looking at its best.

The houses, residences of wealthy people, not of Durban only, but of men engaged in mining and other pursuits in Natal and elsewhere, and now filled with refugees, have the distinct advantage of being detached and are built in spacious grounds. The terraced lawns and gardens are kept in the beautiful order peculiar to England and English homes, and convey the impression of beauty and comfort.

The irregular style in which the houses are built and the different sites suggest the idea that an extensive and unlimited view is what is particularly desired, and the balconies and verandas are large, cool-looking, and inviting.

Since leaving the town we have made a gradual ascent, and are now on the highest point on this road, and we stop to look around.

\* Copyright by M. Eugénie Hibbard, 1901.

Behind us the land is hilly or rolling, and before us is the great, wide sea. At our feet lie Durban and Port Natal, the inner anchorage, and a little to the left the outer anchorage. The sky and sea to-day are of one color.

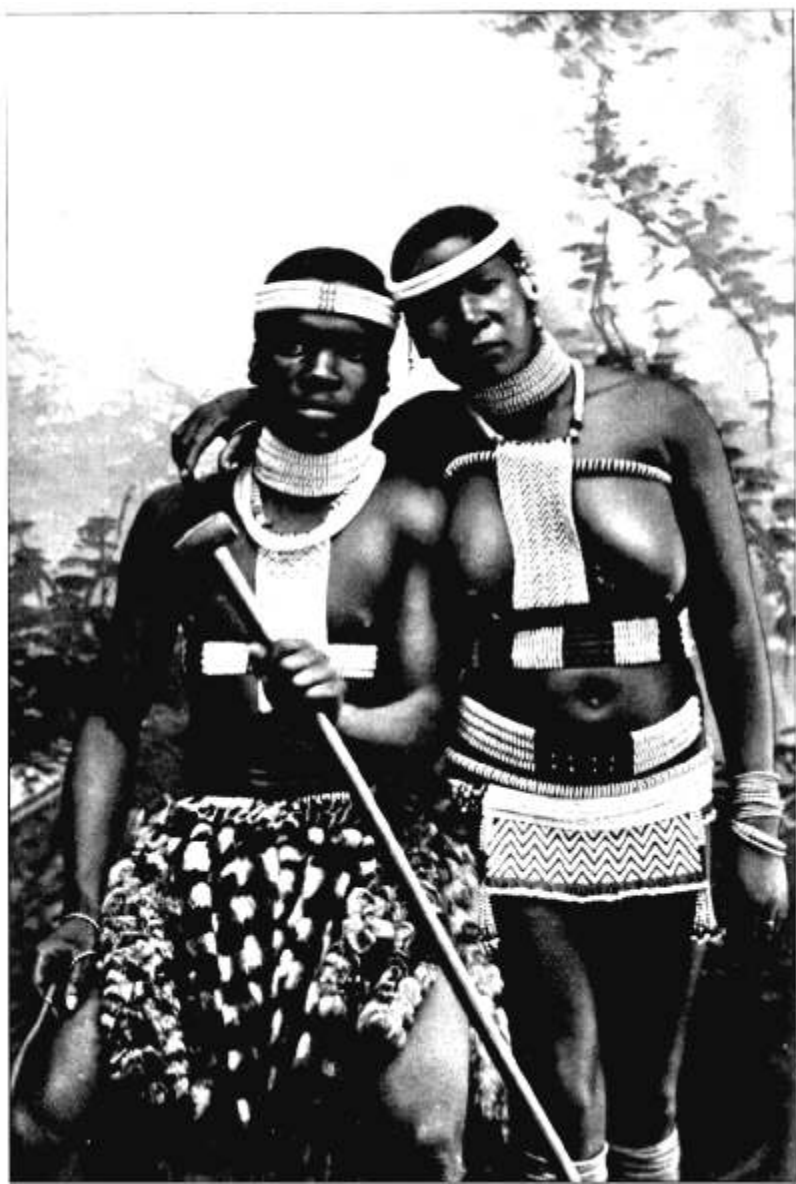
Naturally, we turn first to find the hospital ship *Maine*, and there she lies at anchor in the harbor, looking "like an idle ship upon a painted ocean," so motionless on the still water. The thought came to us that it was a very suitable resting-place for those who had so lately been exposed, on the fighting-line, to the inevitable conditions existing in actual warfare, which perhaps can be better realized in remembering Sherman's words, "For war is Hell." The same idea, though couched in different words, was expressed by one of the wounded soldiers, who, when relating to me his impression of the battle of Spion Kop, said: "I have been brought up to believe there can be no place worse than Hell. Now I *know* there can be no place worse than Spion Kop battle-field."

Satisfied that all was well on board the *Maine*, our comments ran on the different vessels lying at anchor, some within and some without the bar. Most of the larger vessels were the transports utilized to bring over the troops from India. H. M. S. *Terrible* still waits the return of the part of her crew who are absent with the forces seeking to relieve Ladysmith, the pivot on which all our thoughts turn.

We tried to read the flags (this being Sunday, the ships are dressed), which proved a difficult task, though we felt proud in remembering that several nautical terms had become familiar to us and were in daily use since being on the *Maine*.

The fact that a little knowledge is dangerous is emphasized by the following anecdote: A well-known and, I might add, popular writer, in describing a harbor scene at night somewhere in South America, wrote (the sense of which was): "The red and green side-lights of the ships at anchor in the bay, reflected in the water, enhanced the beauty of the scene." This is quite graphic, and makes a pretty picture, but as our narrator continued, "For future reference, should you ever be tempted to become a writer, allow me to inform you that ships at anchor do not carry red and green side-lights," immediately the picture which had been mentally depicted was ruthlessly destroyed, and our comments on ships were effectually silenced.

It must have been at this point on the Umgeni Road, overlooking the Bay, that Kruger, then President of the Transvaal, dreamed of building a residence, from the balcony of which he intended, seated in his arm-chair, with pipe in hand, to gaze upon his navy riding at anchor in the harbor. Castles built in Spain since the Spanish-American



ZULU—BRIDE AND GROOM

War have not proved tenable, and this dream is never likely to be materialized. But who *dare* prophesy these days?

Daily we wait for news, and the little we hear is of a depressing nature. The descriptions given by the wounded soldiers of intrenched positions occupied by the Boers prove that they are a serious menace in the work of relieving Ladysmith, and the tactics employed by the Boer will eventually become a proverb among a people who have learned to respect a foe worthy of their most strenuous effort.

Continuing our drive, we soon came to the Umgeni River, looking to us, accustomed to rivers of size, like a creek, but which, in the pride of the Natalander's heart, is the ship-canal of the future in *Natal*. Here we saw, disporting themselves on the banks and in the water, whole families of Kaffirs, the mother engaged in the family washing, drying the articles as quickly as possible and putting them on regardless of spectators, while the younger members enjoyed themselves lying in the water, blinking their eyes in the sunlight. As we did not see a church, chapel, or temple within the radius of vision, we concluded that these Kaffirs were governed by Watts's assertion that "Cleanliness is next to Godliness," and we were content it should be so.

Umgeni Gardens lay a little farther on, and I must say that we were disappointed in them. The flowers and flowering shrubs are profuse, yet the effect produced by uncontrolled, untrained growth is not pleasing to our critical minds. The Botanical Garden in Durban is very fine and worth a visit.

We have met people of nearly all nationalities and many Kaffirs. Included in the former are Englishmen, Americans, Germans, Egyptians, Arabians, Cingalese, Hindoos, Persians, and Malays. The Kaffirs are composed principally of members of the tribes bordering on Natal, Zululand, Pondoland, Basutoland, and Griqualand, and, with coolies, form the laboring classes principally.

The Zulus, I am told, are a most moral tribe, the crime of immorality being punishable with death. To see the Zulu to his advantage, it should be in his own country. A story is told of an Englishwoman, who, being somewhat disconcerted by the absence of what she considered proper clothing, asked a Zulu woman the question, "Are you not cold, without more clothes?" The reply in the interrogative characteristic fashion was, "Is Englishwoman's face cold?" The answer, "No," immediately liberated the idea in the Zulu's mind, and she naïvely replied, "So me face all over."

The coolies are of Indian descent and are a valuable acquisition in the agricultural districts in Natal.

The Hindoos in dress are very striking, adhering, as they do, to

the Oriental style, wearing ornaments in hair, ears, nose, also anklets and armlets, and babies are to be seen decorated with toe-rings. The silk skirt and head-dress of the Hindoo woman is usually of a bright crimson, yellow, or green color, and particularly becoming to their dusky complexions. The artistic manner in which the dress, a single width of silk of sufficient length, is adjusted to serve as skirt, turban, and drape for the shoulders excites our envy, for the effect as a whole is graceful and picturesque.

A Kaffir and his wife attracted our attention. The former was dressed in very ugly black clothes, high hat, and walked in front under an umbrella with a great deal of dignity. He was followed by his wife, a tall, finely proportioned woman, who, with only a loose tunic of coarse canvas, falling from the shoulders to the knees, and carrying two large bundles on her head, looked at us with apparently as much interest as that with which we regarded them, but a feeling of pity pervaded our thoughts which must have been absent from hers. Yet this heavily burdened woman looked happy.

The Hindoo temple, frequented as a place of worship by the coolies, deserves passing notice only. The building, in the usual temple style, is ugly, though the grounds are spacious and well kept. The entrance is through a roofless square court, which contains several idols unlike any particular object. The doors of the temple proper are in this court. As no one is allowed to cross the threshold without first removing shoes and stockings, our curiosity was easily satisfied, and we contented ourselves with a superficial view.

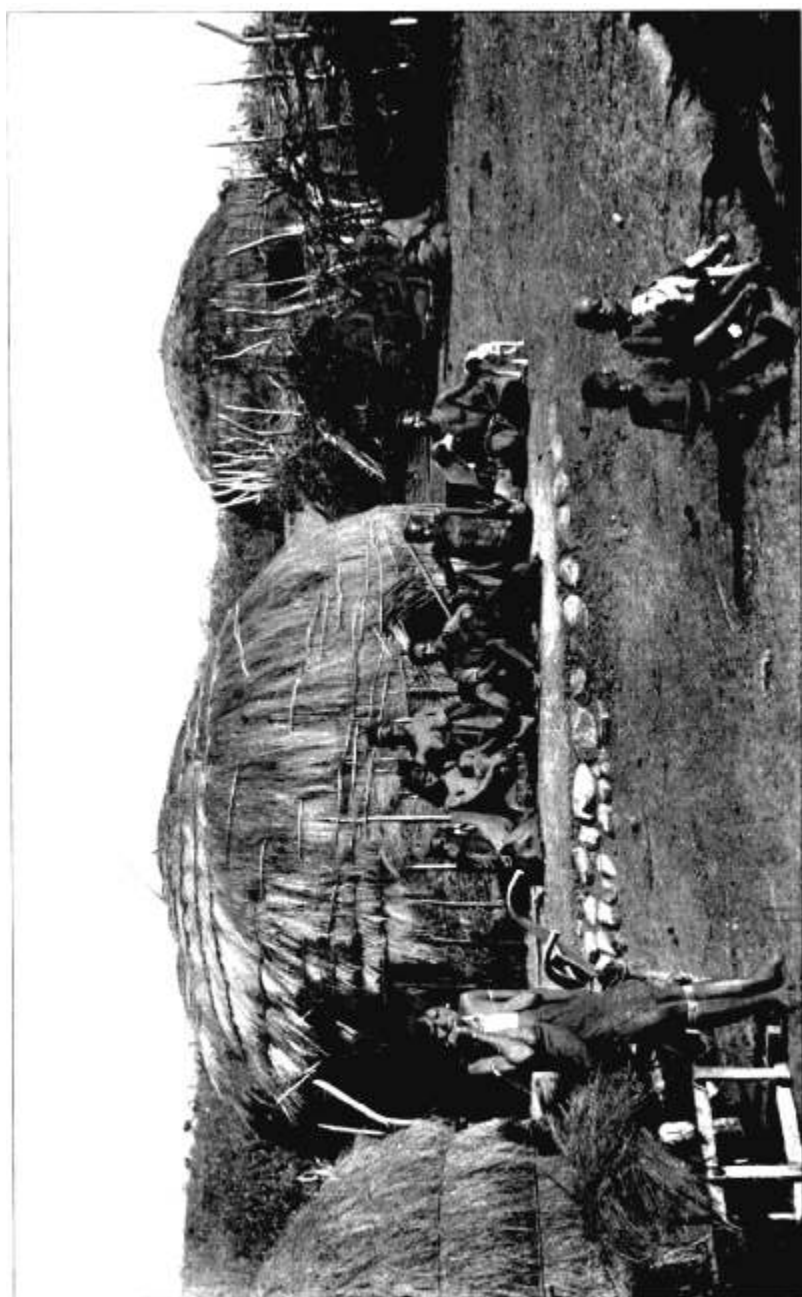
We dined at the Royal Hotel, Durban, and were favorably impressed, especially by the waiters, who are all Hindoos. They wear white linen trousers, no stockings or shoes, loose tunics of white linen also, which are confined at the waist with a sash or belt of gorgeous hue, with an immaculate white turban, most artistically adjusted. Speechless, or almost so, noiseless and rapid in their movements, salaaming and respectful, they appealed to me as ideal servants.

Returning to the *Maine*, our floating home, about eight p.m., we found all the patients had passed a restful day. Captain Percy Scott, of H. M. S. *Terrible*, was on board. He is also commandant of Natal (which is under martial law), and has kindly promised me a pass to visit Mooi River field hospital.

*Monday, February 19.*—Thirteen patients returned to the front this morning. Each received a small souvenir of the *Maine*. In spite of the fact that health had been restored and cheerfulness was conspicuous, those who fully realized the warfare that was being waged were somewhat depressed. No good news yet.



DINING-ROOM OF THE FAMOUS ROYAL HOTEL, DURBAN, NATAL



KAFFIR HUTS, NATAL SOUTH AFRICA

*Tuesday, February 20.*—Raining nearly all day. This afternoon I received a telegram from Sister Kitching, of the Army Nursing Reserve, who accompanied us from Cape Town and is now stationed at Mooi River field hospital, asking me to "come, and I will meet you." As the train leaving Durban at five-forty-five P.M. does not reach Mooi River Station until twelve-fifteen A.M. it was necessary someone should meet me. Making the most of this opportunity, I left Durban the same evening. I was joined in the railway carriage by a nurse dressed in khaki-colored uniform and wearing a red cross on her arm, who informed me that she was a Colonial, and I found little difficulty in entering into conversation with her. She became quite communicative. Having been driven from her home in Northern Natal early in November, she immediately offered her services to the British Government in the hope of being assigned duty on one of the transports returning to England. These appointments were not in the hands of the medical officers in South Africa, and she was now on her way to nurse an officer's family at Pietermaritzburg, the capital of Natal. The wife of an Orange Free State burgher soon made our party three, her destination being one station beyond Pietermaritzburg. At first she appeared reserved and reticent, but after joining us in a cup of tea, the sesame to the Englishwoman's heart, she gave me considerable information regarding the feeling in the Free State. She is now a refugee, her husband remaining in their home to protect the property. She is an Englishwoman, and had married in South Africa. Should her husband be obliged to take up arms, it will be not only against his wife's country, but strongly contrary to his own feelings. The great anxiety of this poor woman seemed to be to keep her children from any knowledge of the war, and she appeared morbidly sensitive as to her own position.

The country from Durban to Pietermaritzburg is said to be very fine. During my trip daylight lasted only until we reached Pine Town, and from the coast up it was one panorama of beautiful hills, valleys, fields, and wonderful tropical plants. The sun, breaking through the scurrying clouds, gave the golden tinge which contrasted wonderfully with the intense green of the grass and trees. The road is a continual ascent from the coast up, and Mooi River is five thousand feet above the sea. Along the line of road are many kraals, built and occupied by the natives (Kaffirs) employed on the road as navvies. These are not picturesque, but are curious specimens of homes indigenous to South Africa.

It was quite dark when we reached Maritzburg, and little of the town can be seen from the station, but a surprise was in store when, after travelling a short time, we rounded a curve and looked down upon a fairy town in a valley. The electric lights shone brilliantly in the



darkness, and it was hard to realize that a scene so beautiful and peaceful should be near to a great struggle between human beings, many victims of which formed at the present time the larger part of the population. Once more we caught another glimpse of the now fast receding town.

Arriving at Mooi River, I was made most welcome. With true English hospitality, Sister Cole, superintending sister of Hospital No. 4, in spite of her many and arduous duties, accompanied Sister Kitching, and I was thus escorted by a guard of honor to the Sisters' quarters, where I found a bed and a cup of hot chocolate waiting me. This is the first night spent on shore since December 21, 1899.

*Wednesday, February 21.*—General Hospital No. 4 is a collection of tents on a hillside, with a commandeered hotel for officers' quarters. The streets run in parallel rows, diverging not the fraction of an inch. This hospital has capacity for one thousand beds and is the second on the line of communication. The patients are brought here from the line or rear hospitals to make room for those directly from the field.

The arrangements, from a superficial and hasty view, seem almost perfect. The P. M. O. (principal medical officer), Colonel Cleary, showed and explained to me the system employed to secure pure water by filtration and heat. The water is then distributed through the camp in pipes. This precaution is considered necessary on account of the well-known prevalence of enteric fever among the troops here as elsewhere. A large reading-room and a dining-room are in course of construction, also an operating-theatre and X-rays room, all built of corrugated iron, wood being a scarce commodity. The order that prevails and entire absence of confusion is marked, appearing as if the stages of excitement had been passed through in consecutive order, and the strict, stern sense of duty now prevailed. Patients constantly coming from the front with continual departures for the base hospital at Pietermaritzburg constituted the daily changes. Here we see in war a calamity so awful in its results, holding human life and torture in its clutches, with the price of the bullet only, scattering and blasting hopes and breaking hearts. On the other hand, we see the magnificent height to which human nature aspires and here attains in the sacrifice of self for country, and often the proof "That greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend." The cemetery on the hill just beyond the camp is simple in construction; small, as one can easily see, when first required, and now enlarged for the third time. It will, we hope, in days to come be properly recognized and honored. Bowing the head in reverence we pass on.

(To be continued.)